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Study Questions for George Orwell's 1984

I. Chapter 1

1. The first chapter provides the setting for Orwell's dystopia. What descriptive details set the novel's action? (example: "bright cold day in April," "clocks striking thirteen," "vile wind," "gritty dust")
2. What is the milieu of Oceania? What "tools" of this suppressive society are focused upon in the first chapter? Are the poster and the telescreen effective?
3. How do the Party's three slogans jibe without Democratic principles? Contrast Democracy with Oceania's government.
4. What are the functions of the three ministries? What paradoxes exemplify Minitru, Minipax, and Miniluv?
5. Democracy is sometimes said to be a "way of life." How pervasive is Big Brother?
6. What is Winston Smith's political conviction? To what does he object about the government? How does he voice his opposition? About what does he write?
7. Describe the Two-Minute Hate. What does this prove about mob psychology? What is Goldstein's function? How is the people's inhumanity displayed during these two minutes?
8. What does Winston sense about O'Brian? Is Smith merely searching for another "human being" -- or does O'Brian truly sympathize with Smith?
9. What crime has Winston committed? Are Democratic Men allowed to be "thoughtcriminals?" Are people of Oceania punished for this offense? How?

Chapter 2

1. Where does Winston work? What is his job? How does his work illustrate the Party's attitude toward history?
2. Does Winston view his job as forgery? Explain.
3. "Everything faded away into a shadow-world in which, finally, even the date of the year had been forgotten." Are Party members real people living in a real world -- or aren't they human at all?
4. Winston's "secret" of rebellion is his memory of the past. How does he maintain this memory?

Chapter 2

1. What are living conditions in London, 1984?
2. What is the "family" of Oceania? Does it function like families today? Compare. What are the roles of the parents? Instead of playing cowboys and Indians, the Parsons's children play spies. Describe. How does this typify their indoctrination into the Party? Why are the children disappointed today?
3. Why does the children's play terrorize Winston? How is irony involved?
4. Winston dedicates his diary. What is the significance of the dedication?
5. Before Winston committed thought crime, he was experiencing "death in life". Now he is experiencing "living death". Explain. Does he value his "death in life"? Give evidence.

Chapter 3

1. Winston dreams about his family. What happened to his parents? What image is dominant in the dream? How did his family differ from the Parsons?
2. Is the Golden Country Winston's Utopia? Who shares this blissful world of nature with him?
3. How does the telescreen attempt to rob Man of his humanity? (example, the exercises)
4. What is Doublethink? (pp. 32-33) How does the party rely upon this theory? What does this theory do to history? Does Winston swallow the propaganda that "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past?"

Chapter 4

1. Where does Winston work? What is his job? How does his work illustrate the Party's attitude toward history?
2. Does Winston view his job as forgery? Explain.
3. "Everything faded away into a shadow-world in which, finally, even the date of the year had been uncertain." Are Party members real people living in a real world--or aren't they human at all?

I. cont'd.

Chapter 5

1. Winston eats lunch with Syme, a specialist in Newspeak. What is Syme's attitude about language? Compare his destructive nature to the viewers of the film in chapter one. What will Newspeak do to literature?
2. What is the aim of Newspeak? How does this typify the Party's slogans? What value for the Individual is present?
3. What does Syme think about the proles?
4. Who sits near Winston? Why is he uneasy?
5. Winston is disturbed by the report from the Ministry of Plenty. How does he react to the alteration of the past of history? Isn't his memory numb?

Chapter 6

1. What is the Party's attitude toward marriage? How was sex to be regarded?
2. Was Winston's marriage a typical Party service? Did Winston enjoy his relationship with Katharine?
3. Big Brother is pervasive. Has he made even marriage an impersonal, cooperative governmental service? Can't Party members be human beings with feelings, with emotions, with love?

Chapter 7

1. "If there is hope, it lies in the proles." Why does Winston believe this? Why does the Party regard this as harmless?
2. What tale do the Parson's children's history book tell about Capitalists? Is Winston convinced this a true version?
3. Winston is troubled by the ideals of the Party and the real situation. Ideals and reality don't coincide. Explain.
4. What security event occurred which destroyed Winston's faith in the Party? Why did it?
5. Is a lunatic simply a minority of one according to Winston, according to the Party, according to you? What is one Individual worth?
6. Winston longs for freedom. Contrast Democratic principles of freedom with those of Big Brother.

Chapter 8

1. What is the Party's policy on ownlife ("meaning individualism and eccentricity")? How does Winston disregard this principle?
2. What does Winston do in the prole section of London? What does he attempt to learn from the old man in the pub?
3. Why is Smith drawn magnetically to the antique shop? What does he buy? Why? Can you explain Winston's infatuation with the old room?
4. What is Winston's first assumption when he sees the dark-haired girl in the prole section? He contemplates his thoughtcrime once more. How does Winston regard his anticipated death? Who does Winston find comfort in recalling? What is the "place where there is no darkness"? Is this ironical?

II. Chapter 1

1. What planned incident alters Winston's relationship to the dark-haired girl? Does she really know what "love" is? Is it possible to know what "love" is? Is it possible to know "love" in such a society? What difficulties are encountered in arranging a meeting? Are these obstacles planned by the party to discourage love?
2. Julia and Winston finally meet in Victory Square while watching prisoners file past. What is ironical about this meeting? (page 97)

Chapter 2

1. This chapter draws upon Winston's memories. He encounters the Golden Country of his dream, the chocolate of his childhood, the human feelings he recalls in his family. Does he consider his attraction for Julia to be a union of two human beings?
2. Why does Winston delight in Julia's lack of purity? "It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act." Explain.

Chapter 3

1. Do Julia's reasons for opposing the Party differ from Winston's? Is Julia's world-view selfish?
2. Does Winston approve of Julia's acceptance of the Party, of her being "not rebellious of its authority, but simply evading it, as a rabbit dodges a dog?"
3. What are the two reasons given by Julia for the Party's sexual puritanism?

4. "So long as human beings stay human, death and life are the same thing." What does Winston imply by this statement? Does Julia accept this remark?

Chapter 4

1. Julia and Winston create their own world in Mr. Charrington's antique shop. What are some of the luxuries forbidden by the Party that they pinch for their escape?
2. What is Winston's great fear in life? Note the foreshadowing.
3. What is the significance of the paperweight? What does it symbolize?

Chapter 5

1. Instances of the Party's power to alter the past are present in this chapter. Find them.
2. How do Julia and Winston regard this room? Do they think it will be an eternal escape? How has this situation affected their lives?
3. Analyze Julia's character up to this point in the novel. When does Julia question the party's teachings? When Winston talks about changes in Party doctrine, what does she do? Is she as sensitive to the real issue of humanity as Winston?

Chapter 6

1. "It had happened at last. The expected message had come." What was this message?
2. What are the four steps toward death which Winston takes?
3. "The end was contained in the beginning." Why doesn't this sure-death matter to Smith? Is he now frightened when viewing his punishment as a short-term end?

Chapter 7

1. The paperweight initiates Winston's dream. What does he dream about? Why does the "enveloping, protecting tecture of the arm" contain the entire meaning? Characterize Winston's mother. Do such gestures mean anything in London, 1984?
2. "The proles are human beings. We are not human." Discuss.
3. Upon what do Winston and Julia rely in order to eternize the relationship? Does this retention of the inner heart, of humanity, bear a chance against the Party? Note the irony.

Chapter 8

1. How does the life-style of the Inner Party differ from that of other Party members? What does this exemplify about the ideal-reality gap?
2. What is the Brotherhood? Is it an organization? Describe its policies. To what in our culture does 'the book' compare?
3. Winston proposes a toast. To what do they drink?

Chapter 9

1. During Hate Week, the past is once more altered. How do the Party members accept the alteration?
2. "War is Peace" Winston reads Goldstein's theory about this slogan. What are the characteristics of the 1984 war?
3. How does doublethink lend itself to war?
4. What are aims of the party? (page 159) Does this erase the possibilities for humanity?
5. How does the Party limit science? What is its policy on atomic weapons? Is Orwell commenting on our society?
6. Why does the Party allow no contact with foreigners?
7. Is 'denial of reality' an effective Party control?
8. Are the effects of peace and war the same? Is this the meaning of 'war is peace'?
9. Explaining the slogan 'ignorance is strength,' 'the book' describes the classes of London society, 1984. Which class is unsuccessful in achieving its aim? Why?
10. World movements perpetuate unfreedom and inequality. How would these tenets affect our present society? Discuss the purpose (page 167) of these principles.
11. Describe the years preceeding Ingsoc.
12. Is the mobilization of society today, November, 1969, an educational question?

13. What is the power structure of Oceanic society?
14. How are crimestop and blackwhite related to doublethink?
15. "Why should human equality be averted? Supposing that the mechanics of the process have been rightly described, what is the motive for this huge, accurately planned effort to freeze history at a particular moment of time." Reflect.

III. Chapter 1

1. Where is Winston sent after his capture?
2. Describe Smith's initial experience in prison. Who is with him?
3. How does Winston finally learn the meaning of O'Brien and his agreement to meet in the 'place' of no darkness?

Chapter 2

1. How is torture used to condition Winston? Compare this to Skinner's Walden II. How are the various degrees of torture utilized?
2. What does O'Brien state to be his reason for torturing Winston?
3. Will Winston retain his humanity after this experience?

Chapter 3

1. What are the stages of reintegration to the party? What in prison constitutes each stage?
2. Who wrote the book?
3. Why does the Party seek Power? What other historical factions have had the same Power drive?
4. Freedom is Slavery. Explain.
5. The Party is creating the opposite of Utopia--a dystopia. Instead of love and human understanding, the government is based on what? (page 220)
6. How does Winston react to his isolation, his aloneness, his emaciated state of spirit and body?

Chapter 4

1. Is Winston completely brainwashed yet? What does he vow to retain? Does he hold firmly to his 'freedom'?

Chapter 5

1. What occurs in room 101? How was Winston's primary fear foreshadowed in the novel? Whom does Winston renounce in the 'acceptance' stage? Is he completely reintegrated to the Party?

Chapter 6

1. What is Winston's situation in this concluding chapter?
2. What is your reaction to Smith's acceptance of the Party? Was it the result of his weakness, or not? Is then a minority of one a lunatic?

"O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the side of his nose. Everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."

General Questions

1. Are we, as a nation, moving toward Orwell's prediction in 1984? What place has the individual in our society? (race, law, business, education, etc.) Is the minority of one respected in all facets of American life? What is our nation's power drive--a means or an ends?
2. How does Orwell intend his forecast of the future? Is he totally pessimistic?